



## The Middle East Partnership Initiative Encouraging Participatory Politics

**“There is no right more fundamental than the ability to choose your leaders and determine your destiny. Now, make no mistake: The ultimate success of democracy in the world won’t come because the United States dictates it; it will come because individual citizens demand a say in how they are governed.” U.S. President Barack Obama - September 23, 2010**

The Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) supports citizens in their efforts to have a voice in the decisions that impact their daily lives. MEPI helps to build democratic institutions, advance the protection of basic political freedoms, and facilitate civic activism, all essential elements of fostering more participatory societies throughout the Middle East and North Africa (MENA).

### ENGAGING CIVIL SOCIETY

Civil society’s central role in democracy makes it a central focus of MEPI’s efforts across the region. MEPI promotes freedom of association so citizens can organize, assemble, debate, and advocate their views. MEPI support — through direct grants, networking, and capacity building projects — strengthens the active citizens who serve as the region’s most dedicated and successful agents of change. Focusing on local organizations and grassroots initiatives, MEPI is laying the groundwork for sustainable, locally-driven political reform and democratic governance.

**Egypt** – MEPI is making a special investment in activity by independent civic groups during Egypt’s crucial 2010-2011 election cycle. These projects support independent media, educate youth on their civic roles and responsibilities, and bolster rights monitoring and advocacy. In 2005, MEPI worked with the Independent Committee for Election Monitoring (ICEM), a coalition of Egyptian NGOs under the leadership of the Ibn Khaldun Center, to field over 5,000 election observers nationwide. Similar election-observation efforts are underway this year with MEPI support.

**Yemen** – MEPI’s efforts in Yemen increase the capacity of civil society organizations to inform and influence policy debates. The Yemen Polling Center (YPC), founded in 2005, is one of the first polling centers in the country. Using MEPI funds, YPC has conducted public attitude surveys, focus groups, demographic studies, economic surveys, and market research that help shape the policy debate in Yemen.

**“...democracy requires far more than an election. It has to be a 365-day-a-year commitment, by government and citizens alike, to live up to the fundamental values of democracy, and accept the responsibilities of self government.”**

**U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton - July 3, 2010**

### STRENGTHENING DEMOCRATIC PROCESSES

MEPI encourages vibrant electoral politics by training political parties and candidates. We place a special emphasis on enhancing participation by disenfranchised groups, such as women. MEPI’s partners monitor elections and train election observers to support free, fair, and transparent processes. Local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) use MEPI support to encourage voter registration, educate voters, advocate for electoral reforms, and promote public participation in politics.

MEPI projects also help elected representatives learn the skills to serve their constituents. Working with political parties, MEPI helps develop their skills in building grassroots support and developing constituent outreach. Lastly, MEPI helps foster effective dialogue between civil society and government on how to solve tough social problems.

**Lebanon** – After the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri and the popular uprising that ousted Syrian forces from Lebanon in 2005, MEPI mobilized U.S.-based and Lebanese organizations to help Lebanon prepare for independent parliamentary elections. Since then, MEPI has helped local civic groups work together across sectarian lines, improve electoral laws, and press for government transparency. MEPI also supported civic groups engaged in the 2009 parliamentary election process.



**Kuwait** – MEPI is a leading supporter of the fight for women’s political empowerment in Kuwait through campaign schools, civic education, and get-out-the-vote efforts. The May 2009 Parliamentary Elections resulted in the unprecedented victory of four women, all alumnae of MEPI projects.



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For more information, visit MEPI at [www.mepi.state.gov](http://www.mepi.state.gov) and our regional offices in Abu Dhabi and Tunis at [www.abudhabi.mepi.state.gov](http://www.abudhabi.mepi.state.gov) and [www.medregion.mepi.state.gov](http://www.medregion.mepi.state.gov).

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## PROMOTING THE RULE OF LAW

Equality under the law is a fundamental tenet of democracy, and MEPI works to promote democratic legal reforms across a range of issues and sectors. MEPI projects educate citizens on their legal rights and work with government officials to build better legal infrastructure for business and politics. MEPI places a special emphasis on legal reforms that enhance the protection of fundamental political freedoms, including speech, association, and assembly.

**Yemen** - The International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL) is directly engaged with Yemen's Ministry of Social Development to assist in the improvement of the legal environment for civil society in the country. Among its recent accomplishments, ICNL organized a "civil society consultation" group consisting of civil society representatives from outside of the capital to propose changes to current government legislation. Ministry officials agreed to several of the proposed changes. As a result, civil society groups were encouraged to work with government officials to help them comply with existing laws.



**Bahrain** – The American Bar Association (ABA) is working in Bahrain to increase consistency in the administration of justice by enriching the skills and qualifications of Bahrain's judges and prosecutors. ABA helps develop judicial training capacity, enhance court

administration and management, introduce alternative dispute resolution, and strengthen local bar capacity.

**UAE** – The "Know Your Rights!" project is designed to empower Emirati women to understand their legal rights and increase their awareness and application of the UAE's personal status law. In addition, this project trains women on their rights under the recent labor and human resources laws. The "Know Your Rights!" training program has witnessed participation well beyond expectations throughout the country and has received consistent positive local press coverage since its inception in November 2009.

**West Bank and Gaza** – Through MEPI, the Al-Mustakbal Foundation for Strategic and Policy Studies is strengthening the commercial legal and regulatory framework for businesses with the goal of promoting economic recovery and growth in the West Bank and Gaza. The project educates the business and legal communities on complex commercial law regulations and increases private sector participation in commercial law formulation.

## BUILDING NETWORKS FOR CIVIC ACTIVISTS

MEPI uses traditional and innovative tools, including social networking, to help regional activists expand their impact, sustain their efforts, and learn from one another's experiences. MEPI's networking projects help the region's burgeoning civil society sector build a sustainable infrastructure for successful activism.

*Increasing Social Connections* - Seizing the tremendous opportunities that come with web-based interconnectivity, MEPI helps MENA citizens access and use innovative online technologies to build social connections. MEPI partners with people to create a variety of online social networks - such as the MENA Businesswomen's Network and the over 6,000 strong MEPI Alumni Network. These networks have allowed current and former participants of our projects to gain access to information that helps them advocate for changes within their own governments, generate new ideas, learn from each other's experiences, and encourage creativity and entrepreneurship.

*Empowering Through New Media* - MEPI supports a series of pilot projects to expand civic participation and increase new media capabilities among the MENA region's civil society organizations. In Fall 2010, MEPI awarded three grants totaling over \$3.65 million to help build the technological capacity of civil society organizations in the region. More than \$1.6 million of this funding was awarded to the Institute of International Education (IIE) to implement a cutting-edge new project, *New Media Technical Assistance for Civil Society*. The project will bring together many of the world's foremost new media experts and companies to empower non-governmental organizations and civil society organizations in Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, the UAE, and Yemen with new media training, tools and mentoring. This dynamic public-private partnership will increase access and skills of NGOs and civil society leaders to use new media effectively to advance their missions, and communicate with governments and stakeholders to influence political and social reform.

